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MAYBE
KARA CANAL
THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Art
in Imaging Arts; Rochester Institute of Technology, submitted May 14, 2007.

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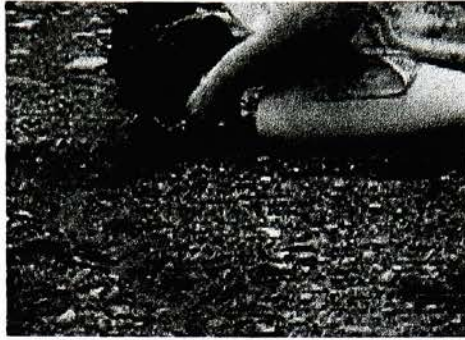
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Maybe Thesis abstract
Kara Canal



Maybe consists of an installation space embracing three video projections, each presenting the viewer with a series of distilled moments. Every connected element in the installation provides an opportunity for engagement with the intangible memories of adolescence. The video pieces present fragments of narratives and invite viewers to fill in the gaps with their own memories, reflections and experiences. The point of view of the camera in each video positions the viewer as a voyeur—and as such the viewers are granted the opportunity to pause, consider and reflect, and hopefully realize something new about themselves while participating in the actions contained where repetition, sensuality and loss are played out without resolve.



*Reality is continuous, multiple, simultaneous, complex, abundant and partly invisible.
The imagination alone can fathom this and it reveals its fathomings through art.*

Jeanette Winterson

1. Introduction



video still from *Dream*

My thesis project, *Maybe*, consists of an installation space embracing a neon sign, an empty wall with empty photo frames, and three video projections, each presenting the viewer with a series of distilled moments. Every connected element in the installation provides an opportunity for engagement with the intangible moments of nostalgia. The video pieces present unfulfilled narratives and invite viewers to fill in the gaps with their own memories, reflections and experiences. The point of view of the camera in each video positions the viewer as a voyeur—and as such the viewers are granted the opportunity to gaze without fear of being caught while participating in the actions contained where repetition, sensuality and loss are played out without resolve.

The work engages narrative elements presented with a lightness and (at times) laughter that is not present in my own past. In this thesis, I have recast my history, rearranging reminiscences (emotional, physical) to set them in relief to reflect and re-

imagine. My thesis work was an exploration that allowed me to recontextualize my memories and experiences. My interest in self-portraiture, memory and childhood were fused in the creating of *Maybe*, and through the work I reconciled facets of my past history and present story.

The development of my thesis work came from a desire to deeply explore narrative, memory and childhood. However, I wanted to create a personal work that would resonate beyond the personal itself, to address the larger construct of childhood memory and narrative. My thesis exhibition and installation, *Maybe*, is an amalgamation of ideas from the past two years, as well as reflections on the confluence of adolescence, identity and sensuality. *Maybe* is not about one specific event or story as it is rooted in memory, and as such can only be a collage of gestures. In this way, it is many fragments that combine and overlap. The process of creating my thesis project was a process of building up and then carefully peeling away images. The images I selected to show for thesis explored combined to tell stories in a different way—to and share images that “do not exist in isolation but speak back and forth to one another” (Watson, 14). The videos are not intended to be viewed singularly, as the meaning of the work I created for *Maybe*, evolves in the spaces in between watching one video to the next. The story comes from the collaboration of images connecting with the viewer. “Without a story, without an unfolding, there is no meaning” (Berger, 89). *Maybe* is a record of this unfolding.

2. Photographs Past



King Christopher, Philadelphia, 2001

Before I begin to talk about my video works, it is necessary for me to rewind and explore my relationship to photography and art making which informed my journey to video. I began photographing while under deep analysis; I have always considered my photographs to be self-portraits. Learning photography concurrently while in psychoanalysis made this correlation simple to grasp, but difficult to explain. I had found a new way of communicating, a language of images that told stories about my unconscious mind. My photographs revealed, confessed, and spoke for me when I had no words. The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke speaks to this notion of wordlessness in *Letters to a Young Poet*:

Things are not so comprehensible and expressible as one would mostly have us believe; most events are inexpressible, taking place in a realm that no word has ever entered, and more inexpressible than all else are works of art.

My earliest black and white photographs are unquestionably self-portraits. Inspiration to create arises from my memories, desires and subjectivity. The work does not possess a specific narrative that can be pinned down. Rather, it takes from many sources, and is fragmented, or collaged. The images I was making were projections. They were places where “emotions or wishes” that I sometimes had difficulty acknowledging, were “relocated” or “projected” in my work (Childers, 246). Thereby, my work becomes a mirror. All that went unexpressed reappears and voices itself in my images. The images, taken together, tell a story of what I was thinking, feeling and experiencing. The stories they speak are at times anachronistic, blending and recreating past and present, real and imaginary, allowing my unconscious to be unlocked.



Exquisite Form, Philadelphia, 2001

The unconscious seems analogous to raw, unedited video. It silently stores all of our emotions, dreams and realities. It captures our life in ways similar to the magic realism genre in literature. Magic realism authors “interweave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales” (Fletcher). Magic realism draws from reality and conflates it with the mythological or collective, enriching the stories with a complexity that is simultaneously paradoxical, poignant and hyper real. Magic realism is another way of explaining the connections between art making and the subconscious. When the creative mind rummages through itself to find inspiration it pulls from the stories that we already know to compliment, or subvert. Consider this passage from Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* where the author introduces Tomas (will be one of the main characters) by reflecting on his artistic process of visualizing him:

I have been thinking about Tomas for many years. But only in the light of these reflections did I see him clearly. I saw him standing at the window of his flat and looking across the courtyard at the opposite walls, not knowing what to do.

Kundera places himself inside the structure of the narrative, as both the author as well as the observer, and in so doing the reader is given the dual pleasure of seeing the world through the eyes of Kundera the author, Kundera the narrator in the story, as well as Kundera in the voice of the characters in the story. Magic realism is about multiple streams of narrative, that flow in and out of each other to compliment, reveal and add tension to each other.

My intention to blend the fantastical with the realistic lead me to explore video, as working/thinking in video provided me with the opportunity to visually edit ideas in ways I had never before experienced. An association was made in video that was not possible

at the time in photography for me. Editing moving images made the connection to narrative more immediate for me.



Galatea, Philadelphia, 2001

Our unconscious stores all of our emotions, dreams and realities. We never have enough time to pause, rewind or edit our actions. To do so would be against our nature, or desire, as our tendency is to move forward so much falls unexamined.

The evolution/process of my work is related to the process of discovering the unexpected—of seeing the unseen. I view my work as analogous to the thrill of looking at what the camera captured unknowingly. There exists in almost every photograph a magic spot, a favorite glimmer of light, a slant of the body, a caprice captured—it is such moments that are unconscious that make photography so thrilling. The magic of

photography is in its innate ability to record the un-conscious/seen. As Marianne Hirsch explains in her book *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*:

The camera is like psychoanalysis. There are optical processes that are invisible to the eye; the mechanical processes of photography can expose them. The camera can reveal what we see without realizing that we do, just as psychoanalysis can uncover what we know without knowing that we do: what is stored in the unconscious...just as psychoanalysis can reveal unconscious content through the formal and precise techniques of the therapeutic encounter (118).

The same enchantment that appears to manifest inside photography, also exists in video work. Throughout the past two years of exploring photography and video, I objectively knew what I was doing/making, the rest was left to my unconscious to work out. I have faith in following my intuition, and on the deep connections between creativity and analysis. I found my path when I least expected it. My work dialogues with itself, and what I was thinking and exploring is connected for me. The final body of work that comprised *Maybe* is a work that I am confident required my letting go. The video works in *Maybe* are a process towards understanding what I know without knowing—a story of the unseen, or unspeakable—inside of me.

That said, my art is autobiographical, yet not so specifically that the viewer is excluded. On the contrary, I believe my work I made for *Maybe* allows for multiple opportunities for the viewer to participate and identify. Although I make work about myself, I am aware of my audience, and hope to develop a dialogue that incorporates not only my voice and my memories, but also that of a collective understanding of experience.

All of my work exists as a mirror, and can see me more clearly than I can see myself. Perhaps viewers who engage with my work may see things about myself (and themselves) that I am blind to. It is this possibility for knowledge of the unknown that

spurns me on to continue creating. By exploring video I was able to use myself (my body) to push myself to experience unfamiliar terrain and to explore specific questions of identity. In my photographic work I looked outside myself to see myself. With my video work I looked to myself to see myself. With a video camera I was able to watch myself watching myself.

3. Watching Myself: Video Explorations



*Don't Come Home A-Drinking (With Loving on Your Mind),
From Kara Karaoke project, 2002-3*

Before I began the actual thesis project, I made several related explorations in video. The explorations I made clearly reflect my journey from the literal to the symbolic. My earliest videos were more concrete, and have a definitive beginning, middle and end. My thesis video work is looser in structure, and is more concerned with presenting a cohesive whole out of fragmented parts—each video informs the next and the conversation that they evoke is where the meaning is located.

As previously stated, my early photographs were mirrors. They were documents of my surroundings that seemed to speak to me about loss, absence and femininity—images that illustrated the story of my psychoanalysis. The same process that worked so well as a way of making meaning in photography did not translate in video. I had to search out a new system of image making. Video making became a separate process for me.

Photographing was about exploring my environment and uncovering invisible signs. I did not make photographs of my friends or myself, but used the streets and

strangers of Philadelphia to stand in for myself. Making the switch to work exclusively in video during graduate school encouraged me to construct a new method of working, with myself as my principle subject.

Working in video provided me with a new way of approaching making meaning. In my photographic work I felt at an impasse. I was trying to grapple with narrative, but in the process the images felt forced, and insincere. Video granted me newness of approach, and with this newness, an opportunity to communicate in a new language. Moving images motivated me to see an alternative way to create in a new direction.

While video trained me to be encouraged in a different way, the work I made were still the same mirrors and self-portraits. The opportunity to make the same work in a new medium, to say the same thing in a different form, allowed me a different ground to reflect on. In video I recorded my life, myself, my friends, my reality—I captured glimpses, stills from the story of my life. Subsequently my recent photographs are able to be what they are because I was able to reconcile disparate parts of my creativity through working with video. I now believe that I needed to walk away from photographing to become the photographer that I am now.

I am thankful that I did not limit myself to photography and allowed myself the freedom to explore other media until I arrived at my thesis work.

First Video Explorations/Experimentations

My first video was *Happy Ending*. The three-minute video is set to a bubbly pop song as people bounce in and out of the screen seen sitting in their beds eating. The piece was inspired by Yoko Ono's early conceptual videos that she made while part of the Fluxus Movement.

Fluxus emerged out of Dadaism, and artists that were involved with the movement "valued simplicity over complexity" and believed that art could be made out of anything. All art wishing to be aligned with the Fluxus movement should be concerned with the intersection of disparate media and ideas, and be simple, fresh, and fun. Yoko was interested in her impulses, and had such confidence in her ideas that she saw them through. Yoko's fearlessness, playfulness and confidence in her creativity inspired me to trust myself (in a new medium) to be simple, fresh and fun.



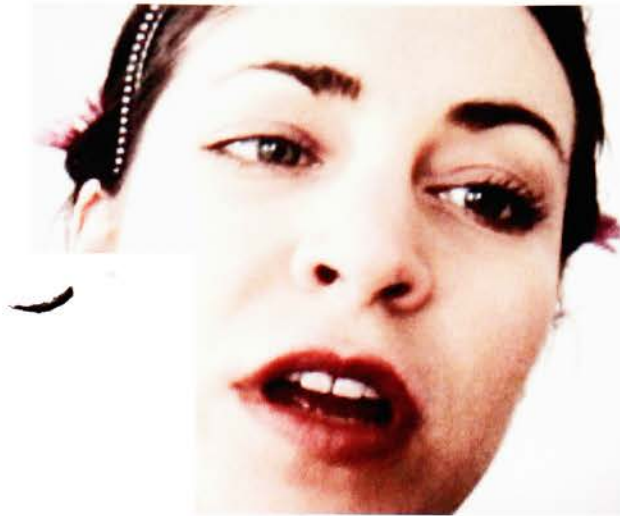
still from *Happy Ending*, 2002

The concept for *Happy Ending* was uncomplicated: I asked my friends in my graduate cohort to eat their favorite food in bed in their underwear. The piece looks carefree and light, and references MTV's video aesthetic. It is a reflection on consumption, pleasure, and desire, and ultimately with America's preoccupation with orality. Over indulgences in food, talking or material consumption all fall under the

Freudian concept of Oral Fixation. Although this notion was not my intention in making *Happy Ending*, it became clear that the video was more than the sum of its parts, and my video exploration became more of a social comment than mere play.

The ability to produce a bright and colorful visually appealing work was something that I had never accomplished before. The process of creating *Happy Ending* allowed me to learn several lessons. Through trusting my instincts I was able to craft a video work that was objectively bright and bold. I created a piece that was in total opposition to my still black and white photographic work. Meaning was initially thought to be simply in the process, but this was not entirely so. The deeper meaning was (initially latent to me) manifested upon reflection and dialogue. A pattern of setting course in one direction and arriving at an unintended position is the thread that connects all of my art making processes,

The video works that I was involved with making are all equally as important to the final three that I selected to show in my thesis exhibition. The videos that I was working on in between and concurrently with my thesis videos are all part of the development of my artistic confidence, exploring and listening until my work began to have a dialogue with itself. By seeing how certain video pieces amplified or complimented each other, I began to see patterns emerge and themes repeat.



Radiohead's *Creep*, from *Kara Karaoke* project, 2002-3

My videos are largely about feeling out and performing identity (and vanity). In the *Kara Karaoke* series I shot myself very close up and sang directly into the camera. I selected pop songs that allowed me to express a range of emotions and identities. Each video is stylistically similar, but each looks and feels distinctive as I tried on different personas in song. I made myself my own superstar in these videos; I become a simulation of a simulation. In the shadow of Cindy Sherman performing for her camera, I dressed up and performed for my video camera. I played with identity not only with clothes and lighting decisions, but also with song choices. Trying on (often opposing) identities urged me to question my personal ideology of self and the boundaries crossed over and maintained to compliment and complete a complex singular personality.

As is true for many artists I most admire (Gillian Wearing, Pipilotti Rist, Jo Spence, Hannah Wilke, Francesca Woodman, Tracey Emin, Karen Kilimnik) I am interested in how we locate truth in our identities. Videos and photographs are “an interpretation of the world” and being interpretations, how much residue of the real

remains? (Sontag, 17). How much truth is ever present in art works? By documenting do we subtly subtract an essence of truth? In *Cry*, I recorded myself extremely close-up while crying. The tears were real, but when done in front of the camera I wonder what changed? Where did the line blur between performance and genuine emotion? The experience of shooting myself while crying—of capturing a rawness of feeling—was cathartic, but the boundary between authenticity and performance is difficult to tease apart.

In performing myself I have a document of my pain and upset, but more essential was the process of watching myself outside myself, and watching others react to the experience of watching me. *Cry* is a necessary component of the exploration process that went on behind the scenes in working towards *Maybe*. The tears that are unseen in *Maybe* are perhaps what give it its weight. Again, the idea in the “invisible present in the visible” surfaces.

Reflecting on the body of work I created over the past two years the *punctum* (Roland Barthe’s term for feeling “pricked” or “bruised” by an image) is located here in *Cry*. Such visceral and up-close and obvious pain is not at all apparent in my thesis body of work, yet the tears are floating around it, lurking in the background. It is the absence of discernable emotion in *Maybe* that infuses it with wonder.

Maybe is a recreation of a specific moment in my adolescence in three fragments (three videos) and as such seeks not to tell a story, but to present emotions. Viewed as a whole, each video colors the next, and combines to picture a memory, a breath or a sigh of adolescence.

Final Walk-Through



Forget Me Not, 2002

My next three videos were shown during my final Walk-Through. Each short video possessed a different feel and approach. I was investigating my options with video, still searching out the boundaries, and experimenting more freely with sound, place, narrative and repetition.



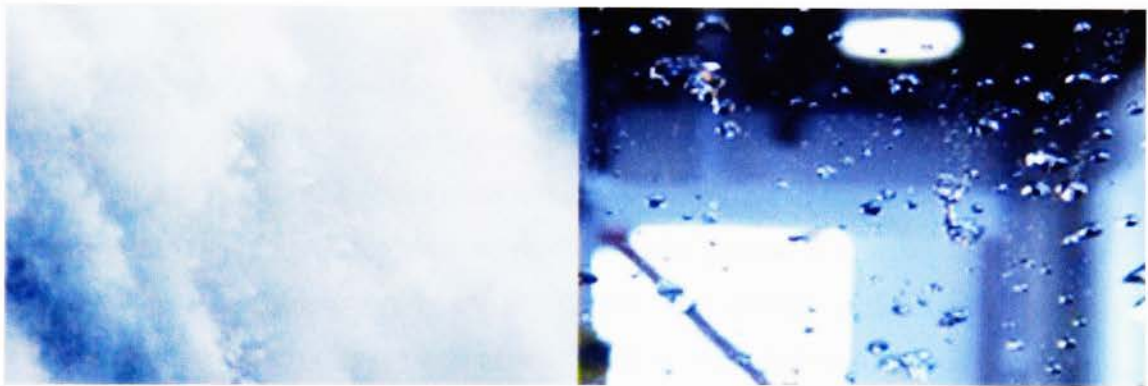
Forget Me Not, 2002

Forget Me Not was a silent short that showed me meticulously making myself up in front of the mirror and then slipping into a bathtub fully dressed. The short video has

an ambiguous ending. Why did I get into the tub? Did I drown myself Ophelia-style? Did I slip down the drain? Was it a dream? Was it meant to make the viewer laugh? Feel sad?

I was tinkering with filmic genre, specifically the Louise Brooks films from the 1930's. I was enacting the role of the exquisitely made up heroine in my own silent movie. I performed the role of the lady in waiting, only to submerge myself finally in the bathtub. In *Forget Me Not* I addressed vanity, female identity, as well as my own discomfort with my appearance and strict adherence to beauty rituals, and of the pressure (imagined or not) to present an ideal image.

I returned to thinking of Yoko Ono, finding confidence in myself to make another video based on a simple idea. The result was, again, a video piece whose questions are larger than I could have anticipated. With this piece I was feeling more comfortable working with video, intuitively giving over the process to my unconscious.



Hymn, 2002

The second video I worked on for my final walk through stands out as being the most unlike all of my other videos before or since. For *Hymn* I crosscut footage of water both manmade (carwash) and natural (Niagara Falls). By manipulating the speed and adding sound I abstracted the two watery subjects. The piece is outside of my other work as it is the only piece that does not have me (or other women standing in for me) in it. The video is a meditation, a silence, and a hymn. It has rhythm, but it speaks a different language than all of my other videos. However, the rhythm and repetition that it carries is present within all of my videos. *Hymn* stands as a pause or a bridge between my earlier video work and my thesis work to come.

My last video that I showed for final Walk-Through was a prelude to the path that I would follow with my thesis work. *Dream* is a video I made inspired by a dream. Previously, I did not consciously make anything directly from my dreams. This video remains the key to understanding a large part of my thesis. In *Dream* a faceless young woman, dressed similarly to Alice in Wonderland, slowly walks along an empty cold shore. She is involved in a ritual—a ritual of digging up fresh roses from underneath the earth. She repeats this process over and over, until she can no longer hold her bouquet. The video repeats.

Sigmund Freud writes about a complex called the *repetition compulsion*. The repetition compulsion “endeavors to make the psychic trauma real—to live through once more a repetition of it...especially in the tendencies of small children” (Freud, 131). The “re-living” of a trauma through memories or actions will continue without end until the recognition is accepted that fear of an unknown future (without the pain of repetition) can be embraced.

Repetition in my video work can be understood in light of Freud’s repetition compulsion. My videos are concerned with repetition (in actions as well as literally looping) and obsessively looking backwards for inspiration from my past. Attempting to look beyond the past and forward to an unknown future (free of the stains of uncomfortable memories) is what is worked out in the process of creating. Clinging to memory stagnates me emotionally and artistically. The inability to stop repeating past mistakes (mistakes of memory obsession, as well) or replaying/reliving past emotions induce paralysis. The repetitive actions in video is a reflection of my patterns of thought—over and over my mind replays the past until I can skip past the sourness of the overly sentimental (which is destructive), and move onward to a place where nostalgia can be tamed (and not surrendered to).

4. Thesis: Dresses flutter, hands cling, and legs swing

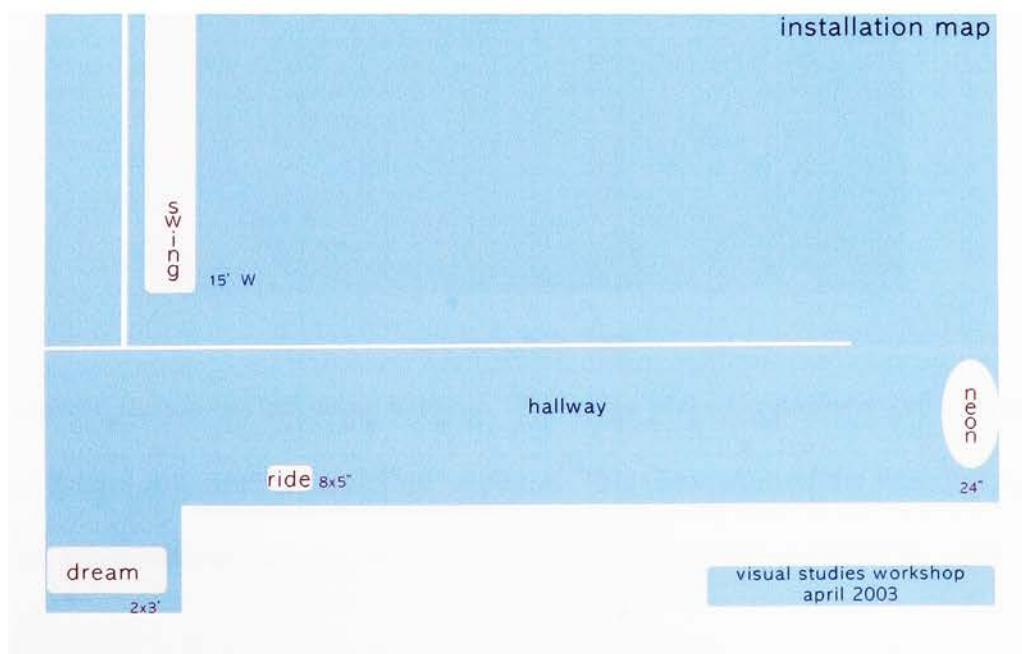


Custom blue neon sign in my handwriting, from *Maybe*

I titled my thesis exhibition *Maybe*, as it is a word that denies immediate resolution. It is a word that is temporary, as maybe leads to an eventual yes or no. Maybe is a word that is in the middle and occupies an ambiguous ground where possibilities can tip forward or back. It is this middle ground that my body knows best. I am caught in the middle, which is intellectually uncomfortable, but emotionally familiar. The three video pieces that comprise *Maybe* also hover in the middle ground. Each video teases in its own way, (the hope of a glimpse, or the hope of an answer) and to tease is to suggest a possible yes, but ultimately not follow through immediately...but, maybe...

Maybe is an exploration in video that suggests a new way of understanding my memories of my adolescence. The multi channel installation was crafted specifically for the space that I secured at Visual Studies Workshop. The large space allowed me to continue my exploration of scale. Each video was projected in a manner specific to its content, playing silently and singularly, occupying its own room. The space provided me with two rooms joined by a hallway. A place for viewing each video was located in the first room, the hallway and in the last (and largest) room.

Each video *Dream*, *Ride*, and *Swing* looped and all are under 5 minutes in length (I recorded each video using a digital video camera, and edited them all with Final Cut Pro). As with photography, “scale of the world” is easily “fiddle[d]” with in video (Sontag, 4). I used the mechanisms of close-up to suggest distorted scale—but also “fiddled” with size/scale in how I elected to project each video. Scale was an integral component to the exhibition. This diagram will help to illustrate how each video was placed in a specific design to underscore its meaning:



“Order and the exact time for looking are imposed” in the layout design, yet there is no one way to encounter the work (Sontag, 5). Multiple ways of experiencing the work was part of the impetus behind the arrangement. Each video relates to the next, the images overlapping and blending in the viewers mind without order.

Dream was the first video that the viewers encountered when entering the installation space. The video was projected 5'x3' directly onto the floor of the gallery. Viewers could walk around and over the video. Because it was shot with a low perspective, and dealt with uncovering and recovering, it felt natural to project on the floor. It is a piece that is about getting down on your knees, getting dirty and searching for beauty, hope and life. It revives. It repeats.



still from *Ride*, 2003

Ride followed in the adjoining hallway. The video played opposite a wall of empty picture frames in a small framed 5"x8" monitor. This video showed the same young woman, again without focusing on her face rocking slowly back and forth on a red

playground horse. The video, like *Dream*, has a slowness that is mysterious, as it is not a speed in which we expect such actions to occur. It moves back and forth, back and forth, forever. The movement in the piece is simple, and combined with the video in the last room it enlarges and echoes.



still from *Swing*, 2003

Swing was projected around the corner from ride directly onto the large 12"x15" wall. The transition from the miniature to the gigantic was important. I wanted the viewers to take pieces from each of the two previous videos and then end up in a large room with one enormous video. *Swing*, simply, is the same young woman swinging back and forth. The camera was positioned behind the swinger, so the point of view is that of a voyeur, a secret glimpse up the dress is almost granted. The tease of the video is where its strength resides. I ask the viewer to imagine what they think they should be seeing, and what they actually are seeing. What do they want to see? What do they see in the piece after seeing the previous two? How do all three of the videos interact within the space?

A way to reconcile the three videos is to understand that they all are

concerned with looking. Each video relies on the pleasure we derive from watching. Laura Mulvey addresses this scopophilic instinct (the pleasure involved in looking at other people's bodies) famously in her seminal essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Mulvey uses psychoanalytic theory to make an argument against Hollywood's continual production of films that place women in roles that support and reinforce how society regards and looks at women. Her essay is bound up with the Castration Complex, and she boldly asserts, "the representation of the female speaks castration and nothing else" (Mulvey, 362).

Women, according to Mulvey, represent bleeding wounds to men—early memories of both horror and fascination. It is the memory of horror that activates the ambivalent attitude that patriarchal society embodies. Being so simultaneously attracted to, and repulsed by women has resulted in a societal structure that, frustrated, fantasizes and abhors women. Such ambivalence is reflected in cinema.

"Cinema is an advanced representation system; it poses questions of the ways the unconscious structures ways of seeing and pleasure in looking" (362). Cinema evolved at the same time as psychoanalysis. It is no wonder that the two are so naturally enmeshed. The two share a language, as well as a historical period. If cinema is a representation of our unconscious, then the question that Mulvey asks: *how can one fight the unconscious?* seems to be the thrust of her essay. Thirty years later, it seems issues she raises have remained unresolved.

Hollywood is a barometer of the "dominant ideological concepts of cinema" (362). Further, cinema is a barometer of dominant patriarchal prerogatives. The power of cinema is acknowledged, and Mulvey seeks to use the innate power of cinema to

politically augment the dominant order. If mainstream cinema goes “unchallenged” as Mulvey fears that Hollywood will continue to “manipulate visual pleasure” to “reinforce a masculinist ideology” (362).

Mulvey anticipates that “alternative cinema [can] provide a space for a cinema to be born that is radical in both a political and an aesthetic sense and challenges the basic assumptions of the mainstream film” (370). Regrettably, mainstream cinema has not yet been satisfactorily challenged. Alternative cinema has taken a very long time to surface as a serious threat to the Hollywood machine. Only now, thirty years later, are their films that actively compete against Hollywood’s predictable plot lines. Cinema indeed has the power to reinforce existing fascinations and social constructions, and by creating an alternative cinema new possibilities can be proposed and/or adopted.

The construction of pleasure is a radical weapon. We cannot destroy beauty or pleasure to promote change. If we subtract visual pleasure from films the industry would come to a grinding halt. Cinema *is* visual pleasure.

Fiction offers an escape. When the general public goes to a gallery, museum or theatre, they do so to be educated, entertained and amused. The power of visual pleasure can be used to seduce the viewer, but it can be dealt with in ways that do not adhere to the support of patriarchal ideals.

I say use visual pleasure against itself. Use the lure of women to seduce and to then subtly assert ideals that rail against patriarchy if this is the filmmaker’s/video maker’s goal. To subtract beauty from cinema is to end cinema. I did not make my videos with the aim of supporting a specifically male gaze. As a female artist who uses moving images to convey meaning, I have considered Mulvey’s call for cinema that can

reconstruct and repair how society views women. What happens when a woman constructs the image that is projected onto a screen especially when the subjects that she chooses to show are women engaged in acts that are undeniably sexualized? What responsibility do I have as a female artist to show women in a different way?

Luckily E. Ann Kaplan has answered this dilemma for me by highlighting how Mulvey's essay fails to address how problematic counter-cinema in actuality would be. Mulvey also fails to admit that Hollywood films do indeed bring pleasure to women viewers despite the fact that they do rely on the oft times unfavorable positioning of women to elicit such pleasure.

Through this work, I am not taking on the weight renegotiating the male gaze; I was simply showing imagined rituals and gestures. My conscious decision to leave out any indication of specific identity (I never showed any faces) supports my idea of making pieces that could not only cohere stylistically, but also to make another space for the viewer/reader to project themselves more easily into the images. I did not use the close-up of a beautiful female face; I used the close-up of gestures.

Gestures are "considered to be the first form of language, and as such they can teach us about the nature of language" (Childers, 126). By removing words and sound I wanted to do exactly this--strip down language to its primitive form. We know gestures as well as we know our own language. It is a separate language that we are all fluent in, we need only to pause and reflect on gestures to see the weight that they can simply convey. Gestures mimic or stand in for words, they do not need words, but they rely on them, much like cinema and analysis.

“The process of cinema mimics in many ways those of the unconscious” (Kaplan, 314). There exists a reciprocal relationship between what I unconsciously wish to tell and what I actual do tell. The unexpected—the surprise that is inherent in all of my videos engages this elemental principle. Furthermore, “if psychoanalysis is a tool that will unlock the meaning of dreams, it should also unlock that of films” (315).

The same language that we use to describe our dreams is used to describe films. This is no coincidence. 1895 was the year that saw the beginnings of both cinema and psychoanalysis. “These two powerful ways of seeing and knowing the world appeared together towards the end of the nineteenth century” (LeBeau, 2). They are twins in many ways. They rely on one another. Film and analysis are less concerned with surface than they are with the unseen. The underground, the back-stage, the unconscious is where truth is located.

5. The End



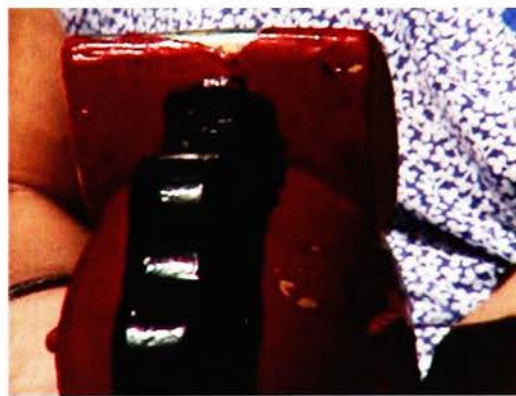
still from *Dream*, 2003

Maybe, hovers in an ambiguous state. It refuses to promise or deny. It embodies the existent and imaginary. The work does not possess a specific narrative; rather it is a suggestion of actions that rely on the interplay of images to complete individual meaning for each viewer. It swings between reality and fiction, and exists as a “duplicate world, of a reality in the second degree, narrower but more dramatic” than life (Sontag, 52).

The best way for me to approach talking about this work is to first suggest that my words are not meant to decode what I have made. Rather I believe that my words are parallel with the work I have made. My words do not run into the videos, they stand along side them. *Maybe* is subjectively about rebirth, reawakening, renewal, and re-arrival.

The process of repetition (looping) can, with each revolution, allow for images to change their meaning. Repetition can mesmerize, lull and take the viewer somewhere else. This is one of my goals in creating—to invite the viewer to places unknown or unexpected. To have them remember something about themselves that they forgot and to suggest a new way of remembering and knowing.

My graduate work has focused on memory, identity, and loss and adolescence. These are the things I know best. The work in *Maybe* leans towards an inflation of ideas about memory and identity with notions of sexuality and childhood memories. If I could reduce my childhood memories to a single moment maybe it would be me rocking back and forth with green grass underneath me and sun on my bare shoulders.



still from *Ride*, 2003

As an artist, I am a spy on the world. As a child I was (and I believe I still am) very good at studying people's idiosyncrasies and gestures. I obsessively noted how people interacted, how people looked when they thought no one was looking. I love subtlety. That said, I think it is clearer for me to understand the position I am approaching with my work. A position that is concerned with watching, thinking and

finding joy and hopefulness in a world that I once conceived of as being a pretty sour place. Things that I once thought of as having gigantic importance now seem miniature.

"All our stories are about what happens to our wishes" (LeBeau, 22). Equally, all that I make is about what happens to my wishes. My work allows me to see what has happened in my past and project it into the present. By seeing my stories, I can see more clearly into myself. Art has the ability to change, much like psychotherapy. The telling and sharing, much like therapy exchanges, is what is important.

My goal in creating this work was to suggest a story without words. I explored numerous approaches and arrived at a body of work that was silent and gestural. The three videos that comprise *Maybe* flow through one another. Within the installation the viewer catches glimpses of a story and is encouraged to connect one video to the next, allowing a story of their own creating to unfold. The videos stir questions, which hopefully remind the viewers of themselves.

By employing narrative elements (close-up, repetition, fantasy, memory) I suggest a story without delivering one. My aspiration was to not present a resolved and complete story (or even a story at all), but to organize and present the elements (culled from my imagination, memory and dreams) to provide an experience for the viewer to make up their own.

Maybe attempted to create a space where the viewer could experience my images and be challenged to connect one work to the next. By entering my installation I wanted the viewer to discover something about themselves that could connect them immediately to the work. *Maybe* is a series of moments that the viewer can piece together to construct

their own ideas of meaning and history. To possibly spark a dialogue that arises from exposure to other experiences.

The work that I have begun at RIT has provided me with the confidence to continue exploring my interest in narrative. Since leaving RIT I have returned to photography, and have been creating images that are stills from my life. The images that I am making now have a voice that is very different than my early images. My new photographs are brighter, less constrained than my early black and white images. The subject matter is portraiture and landscape. I am still interested in memory, but less specifically with childhood memory and more with the creation of new memories. My passion for photographing has been renewed by an exploration of making video. The process of exploring a new medium took me on a journey that has ultimately returned me to photographing.

Maybe is a collection of videos that now stands as a relic to my past, artistically as well as emotionally. The process has allowed be to step out from the repetition compulsion by allowing me to reflect on the previously unseen motivators that were at the heart of the work. I was able to say what I had (and still have) no words for, by expressing myself visually.

I am presently concerned with color photography, and creating images that memorialize the people and places I am surrounded by. As with my video camera, I record the story that is my life. The confidence that I gained by exploring video has allowed me to renew my relationship with photography with a confidence and self-awareness that I did not realize before.

I am no longer interested in mining my past for images. The process I explored while constructing my thesis work has (for now) allowed me to step away from the compulsion to relive and remember and repeat my past. I use the present tense to inspire my current photographic work. My photographs now seek to preserve the poetry of the places and spaces that get passed by—joyfully transforming the ordinary to the extraordinary.

* * *

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

Just as Elliott conflates beauty with pain, life with death in one short verse, I hope to continue to create art inspired by my experiences—both bitter and sweet. It is my goal as an artist to locate visual poetry in unlikely places—like Elliott—to create and share images that are concentrated with beauty and honesty. Beauty that is bittersweet, like lilacs blooming in April.

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